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LOGICAL FICTIONS.

III.

We have seen that the external world is known to us through patterns which appeal to us, as it were, by their flavor through our senses. We have to concentrate on selected bits of experience. And these bits are subjective in the sense that their form depends entirely on the nature of our comprehension, just as a drop separated from the ocean depends for its form on the "comprehension" of the atmosphere. We have also seen that, for practical purposes, this primary comprehension through the senses seems to be immediately modified by what we have called an explanation, the function of which is to satisfy, rather than to "explain" in the ordinary sense of that word. For instance, most of us are content to explain sounds by saying *where* they are, which does not say *what* they are. If, as was suggested, this satisfaction depends on the fulfilment of expectations, it is important to see exactly how these expectations are formed. It is, of course, undeniable that many of our expectations are due, very largely, to emotions and passions. Even philosophers and scientists sometimes see only what they desire to see. But, however great may be the influence of emotion, we are not free, so long as we are sane, to see anything we fancy. The man in the moon is a fiction: the moon is a logical fiction. And it is the purpose of this chapter to explain the difference.

Most people would admit that there is something fictitious in "the space between two trees." A child can recognize such a thing: but if I sold it to you, it might tax the ingenuity of lawyers to decide what it was you bought. It is not hard to convince oneself that although it is easy to talk of a space between two trees, easy to "see" it, it is impossible to deal with it unless we take into consideration its limits. But it is clear that the limits themselves require to be limited before we can deal with them. A tree is a vague term which cannot serve as a clear limit, for it is as undefined as the space until we name the limits: and this can be done only by naming other limits, which also have to be defined by naming limits. Hence it is clear that when we speak of a thing, we are dealing with what may be obvious to a child (that is, what we have called the pattern); but this obvious thing depends entirely on definition, which is what we have called the explanation. Such obvious patterns as "life" and "death" are inconceivable apart from circumstances. If we keep clearly in mind that words not only are symbols for patterns, but also, *insofar as they have any meaning*, imply the defining circumstances as well, we shall see how it is that we can work so accurately and satisfactorily with what seem at first sight to be mere imaginations. It is true, in a sense, that the external world, as we know it, is a construction of our mind and exists, as such, only in us. But any statement we choose to make, provided that we can define the limits, may be true within those limits. We have seen that theoretically it is impossible to limit the limits: the process has no end. But in practice we can fix an arbitrary limit: we can (and must) afford to ignore the infinite remainder. Hence truth is always relative, but for practical purposes relative truth may be treated as if it were absolutely true. This is clearly a fiction, but it is as logical and useful and correct as the

differential calculus. We now have to consider what it is that makes a "logical fiction" logical.

We shall deal in a later chapter with words in combination, that is, the symbol, or expression, of a sentence. At present we are concerned only with one element of such a sentence, namely, such symbols as dog, doom, death, darkness and similar words. We have seen that children can use them: and that any fool can tell, for instance, what is darkness, but only a fool thinks he can say what darkness is. Now it is quite conceivable that a child might recognize one dog, but not two dogs: it might call one of the two a wolf. Thus what you would call two dogs, the child might call a dog and a wolf. Further knowledge, we say, will lead the child to call them two dogs. What is this "further knowledge"? We shall answer this more easily if we work backward. Before a child could say "That's a dog," it may have been able to say that's a "big one" or "a lovely one" or "an ugly one." In other words, we can imagine it being concerned with "ones" qualified by an epithet. Even when we grow up we always think in this way, though we abbreviate. "One" here means an instance of: it is the pattern. That is ONE, we think; we then add the adjective: that is a *lovely* one, that is a *doggy* one. Hence it seems that the obvious pattern we spoke of is really ONE, and the limits or circumstances really epithets. Every *thing* may be first thought of as ONE and then as a *thingy* one. I find it hard to say which of these two is the more astounding performance. For let it not be supposed that ONE is simple. When we are dealing with a dog, the difficulty of seeing the oneness is probably as great as the difficulty of seeing the dogginess. For here again, we are baffled by limits that do not end. For "one" is only an instance of oneness; and as we can none of us remember our efforts in very early childhood, it is extraordinarily difficult to imagine how the faculty is developed; but there can be no doubt that, speaking gen-

erally and roughly, during those early weeks an instinctive desire for rest and for a feeling of safety drives us to concentrate our attention on the more permanent aspects and obvious portions of our perplexing surroundings. It is highly probable that most of our early ONES are unsuccessful constructions; it is certain that many of them are. But however far we go back, it is impossible to imagine any time at which ONE could ever mean anything at all unless at the same time we had some notion as to what kind of a one it was. In other words, it seems impossible to think of any "one" without the explanation that satisfies. It seems, then, that we must answer the question as to the child's increasing knowledge which will lead from "one dog and one wolf" to the correct "two dogs," by saying that the child has got the oneness—there is no doubt that the animal is *one*, whether you call it a dog or a wolf—but that its epithet, its analysis of the circumstances, its idea of the duties to be expected, differs from yours. In other words, the child's taste differs from yours.

It has been said, in fact it is usually taken for granted, that about taste there can be no dispute. That is a preposterous assumption. Taste is the sole argument of all dispute. You admit perhaps that if I say "That is lovely" and you say "That is ugly," it is waste of time to argue. And yet if I say "That's a dog" and you say "That's a cat," ten to one you'll think that it is a matter of fact and by no means a matter of taste. Why? Because you assume in the second case that our taste in natural history is the generally accepted and orthodox taste, which, if once admitted, makes it impossible to mistake a cat for a dog; whereas in matters of esthetics, you are quite ready to believe that the circumstances, the limits, the relativity of my taste differs from yours. But if we can once agree as to what scale we are using to determine the ugliness or loveliness, just as we have agreed on a scale for the classi-

fication of animals, if we are once agreed as to the scale to be used, there can be no dispute. If we agree that loveliness is a matter of size, a whale is lovelier than a flea, but uglier than the world. If we agree that animals are four-legged, whales and men can't be animals, unless we find four legs in them. But it is clear (is it not?) that you can have no scale unless you use some other word: and a word stands for a pattern (including its circumstances). Hence we conclude that no word can be intelligible by itself: a word is and must be understood in terms of others.

This elementary truth is so disguised by common sense and habit that one hears the most astonishing statements as to what is meant (for instance) by "concrete and abstract nouns." We have all, possibly, had to learn this important piece of knowledge at school. We were solemnly told that we could "touch or see" a horse but not its goodness: most of us swallowed this absurdity. No one ought seriously to assert that we can see "horse" or "goodness": when we say we see a horse, we mean one horse or a horse ONE, just as we can see a big ONE, a white ONE or a good ONE. In all these cases we have the pattern defined or limited by the epithet. Just as that space was limited by being "between the two trees," so *that* (whatever it is) is defined or limited by words (expressed or understood) that give the point of view, or, as we prefer to call it, the scale. It is absurd to suppose that there is something extra important in the "horse" point of view. It may be the most common. To an artist the color may be far more important: and men who worship white elephants, white cats or white horses, clearly worship the whiteness and pay no more heed to the animal part than most of us to the age of animals or the number of eyelashes—both of which scales might be important to notice if they served any practical purpose.

We conclude therefore that whenever we use a word,

we are in fact dealing with a pattern which we think of as ONE, considered from a certain point of view. And instead of using such ridiculous terms as abstract and concrete, we shall recognize the following facts: (1) That all words considered separately *as words* express in some way the limits or qualifications of the ONE we have in mind—granted, of course, that it is practically impossible to define “word” in any satisfactory way, for if *mother-in-law* is one word, any sentence may be called one word, and if it isn’t one word, why isn’t it? (2) That in order to get meaning it is necessary always to deal with at least two words, one of which is ONE. (3) That when we are dealing with, let us say, ONE qualified by a word like *horse* (i. e., a horse or horsy ONE) or a word like *chestnut* (i. e., a chestnut horse), these words have meaning only insofar as they supply a scale.

A word like *horse* is a difficult scale, it will be better to deal with easier scales first. It sounds a paradox, but it is true, that in ordinary life most of us do not recognize common things like horses and cats by their horsiness or their catness, but by their shape or some other quite unreliable point, just as a peasant might recognize a whale as a fish because it lives in the sea. What we ought to mean by a horse and what we do, as a rule, mean, are different things; and this ambiguity would lead to confusion. A word like IT, though apparently more difficult, is not ambiguous in that way. When we ask ourselves what we mean by IT, we, with our Western education, probably come to some satisfying explanation by calling it a pronoun, disregarding the fact that languages get on very well without pronouns and that a pronoun of the third person ought not to be used impersonally or unpronominally. If we use it impersonally and say “It is raining” or “It is freezing,” it is not at first sight easy to determine what “it” stands for. Even if we grant that it is equiva-

lent to a termination, so that we might just as well say *rainit*, we do not get away from the fact that it adds something to the meaning. Such a phrase as "*es gibt*" is translated "there is"; we can say "It is a dog" or "There is a dog." Or we might say "There's freezing" instead of "It's freezing." The phrases undoubtedly sound different: that may be a matter of habit. Is there any difference? We do not, of course, suggest that the word "it" is always equivalent to "there." Such a word as "it" may be used idiomatically: it may often have the meaning of some other word that it has come to replace—as all words may; or it may be used much like a diacritic; or it may have no more meaning than, for instance, the first, the inverted question-mark in Spanish. But if we limit our discussion, for the moment, to the way in which it is used when we say "It's freezing" and consider it side by side with such phrases as "We're freezing" or "They're freezing," we cannot fail to see that the actual meaning of "freezing" changes as we change the other words, just as the "space between two trees" will look different from different points of view. If we talk of freezing, as we do in all these sentences, we are not only concerned with the freezing but with the position of it. We are not necessarily anxious to put our finger exactly on the spot of view; but no one, if he is on the lookout for it, can fail to notice how in passing from one sentence to another—*We're freezing—They're freezing—It's freezing*—we do in fact move in space: and by this movement we are able to understand, sufficiently accurately, the "freezing" in terms of its position. Likewise if I say *I'm freezing—My fountain pen is freezing*—I have changed the position in space and thus changed my view of the freezing. We all know what is meant by blushing: notice how the idea adjusts itself as I move it in space—*I'm blushing* (there's blushing here), *he's blushing* (there's blushing there), *the sky's blushing*

(there's blushing in the sunset). In one sense it is the same blushing—otherwise it could not be described in one word; in another sense it is three different things: but the difference is not in the blushing but in the limits—that is, in the space scale.

Let us take one step further. A Frenchman says *il pleut* or *il plut*. Is it not clear that the distinction here adds a time scale? Thus we have "a rainy ONE" not only where? but when? When we say *he loves* or *he loved*, we have a loving there (i. e., in him) then or now. It sounds vague enough: but it is, in fact, so accurate that, if necessary, we could go on defining our meaning more and more precisely. We cannot, as we have seen, get the statement absolutely accurate: it is never possible to get to the end of the circumference of a circle. But relatively, that is, by taking our point of view, we can fix ourselves on the circle and thus measure the rest and find the relative measure; so with space and time we can pin down our ideas exactly enough, the moment the point of view is assumed. From a given point of view there can be no discussion: it is a matter of reckoning; whereas the choice of a point of view is a matter of taste. Thus if I am looking at a yellow flower, the "a" (or oneness) is an assumption: but given that, we can be interested in the color or the flower: in either case we are (if we mean anything at all) thinking of a scale which is implied by yellow or flower, namely an all-the-colors scale and an all-the-plants scale. If we add another epithet and think of bright yellow or small flower, we cannot understand these epithets unless we are thinking of all yellows or all flowers as scales on which we place, as accurately as need be, the individual instance we are considering. Go one step further—fairly bright, very small, and we have here to think of position on a scale of all the brights and all the smalls.

To return to the chestnut horse: if we are thinking of

the fact that it is a chestnut one, we clearly have a scale of all colors—this is, of all colors, chestnut. But if we are thinking of “horse,” it is unlikely that any but a scientist would think of a horse scale. Few of us could explain the essential characteristics of horse. But we all have some idea of its form: and form is the outward and visible sign of movement, a special kind of which is known as growth. It is not possible to determine here how a horse is recognized by the majority. It is sufficient for our present purpose to suggest that, if it is the form that gives the scale, we have as a background and scale for our idea—all possible forms—and, that one which is a horsy one.

Be that as it may, it may help us to see more clearly how the scale works, if we consider the difference between *a kettle singing* and *a singing kettle*. Turning the phrase as before, we have two ONES; one is primarily a *kettle* ONE and the other a *singing* ONE; the next step gives us a singing kettle ONE and a kettle singing ONE. It is clear that, to start with, we have had a scale in the one case, of all possible pots and pans; in the other case, of all kinds of noises.

Hence it seems that in the use of words we are always implying that we are dealing with one particular position or part of a scale. We are always thinking of one with reference to all possible ones. Thus “a horse” means ONE particular spot called horse on a scale that includes all spots (let us say) on the animal scale. The moment I add another epithet I shift to another scale. If we think of the idea represented by a word as a circle, we can see the process more clearly. Horse is a circle which by itself is useless because, unless we select a point of view, we can wander round it forever and ever. But we know that all possible horses exist on this circumference: we speak of a black horse, and at once our circumference is divided into two parts—black and not black. In other words, all

possible horses, viewed in the light of a color scale, immediately range themselves. If we had taken the scale of size and spoken of a large horse, the horses would again arrange themselves into their own portions, large in one part, small in the other. If we combine the two we get the horses still more definitely arranged; and if we add a sufficient number of epithets we shall get what is usually called, to save time, by a "proper name," that is, as a rule, any name except the right name: thus you can call one horse Scepter, Prince, or X, anything, in fact, but horse.

Thus, we always have on the one hand, or, as the phrase is, at the back of our mind, a scale containing all possible ONES; we also have an instance which, insofar as our scale is a useful scale, must at once locate itself. It is as when we are thinking of the scale from 1 to 10, any intermediate ONE, say 5 or 7, at once locates itself, or of the scale of browns, from light to dark, any shade must at once fall into its own place.

It is suspected (except by certain modern soul-analyzers) that when we dream it is not the subconscious that is at work, but that, on the contrary, it is the superficial senses that are supplying matter while the subconscious is unable to scale them: it all seems to happen as in a fairy tale, "once upon a time there was"—and we are never told what time or where. There can be no doubt that we do get, even in dreams, some kind of logical scaling, just as we do when we are fully awake. But the whole realm of dreamland seems to be the fleeting product of those short moments when the senses are rather more awake than the other energy that "scales": this other energy being the cause of right thinking.

Perhaps a simple way of visualizing all this is to think of what happens when an airman is about to drop a bomb on a hostile city. We need not work it all out in detail: but it is clear that although the city far below is the reality,

it is, in fact, beyond his actual reach and, for practical purposes, his map is his reality, though it is man-made and nothing like reality, except insofar as it is a picture to scale. The map is a fiction: it is a logical fiction if it is to the required—that is, a convenient—scale.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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